

Name and location of the community:

Located in the city of Pensacola, Bayou Chico is the receiving water body of a small urban watershed located in southern Escambia County, in the Florida Panhandle.

Background and description of the issue:

Bayou Chico is impaired for elevated levels of pathogens (fecal coliform), excessive nutrients, and low dissolved oxygen. The watershed is highly developed with residential, commercial, and industrial areas. The watershed also includes Corry Field Naval Air Station. A Superfund site, American Creosote Works is located in the watershed with subsurface contamination unrelated to the water quality impairments described above.

Approaches taken to address the issue:

Local stakeholders initiated serious efforts to restore Bayou Chico. Jones Creek and Jackson Branch are the two major tributaries to Bayou Chico. Jones Creek drains Jones Swamp which has been designated a 1,300-acre nature preserve to protect the sensitive wetland from development. A local teacher and a local farmer provided \$20,000 of seed money to help Escambia County government start a stormwater treatment project in the Jones Swamp wetland area. The initial funds were parlayed into grants from the Environmental Protection Agency that have been used to build a stormwater retention pond which filters pollutants from the creek before they enter Bayou Chico as well as observation decks and a boardwalk for public education. The Northwest Florida Water Management District and EPA Wetlands Program awarded a grant to the County to help restore the wetland habitat by removing levees that straightened Jones Creek and drained the swamp. The EPA-National Fish and Wildlife Federation-Southern Company Five Star Grant Program awarded a grant to Escambia County to restore the riparian zone of a portion of Jones Creek. While water quality improvement has occurred, Bayou Chico continues to be impaired. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection has completed a TMDL for fecal coliform and is leading the development of a Basin Management Action Plan with stakeholder participation that will identify the on-going causes of fecal coliform impairment and prioritize a list of corrective actions to restore the watershed.

Key factors contributing to the success of the effort:

Local stakeholder initiative and sacrifice has resulted in leveraging local, state and federal resources to spur restoration of the watershed and attract additional resources.

Identify other important stakeholders in the effort:

Escambia County, City of Pensacola, Bay Area Resources Council, Bayou Chico Association, Emerald Coast Utilities Authority, University of West Florida and The Nature Conservancy have all collaborated to improve Bayou Chico.

A description of EPA's role:

The EPA ORD Laboratory in Gulf Breeze has provided scientific support to the Bay Area Resources Council as a member of the Technical Advisory Committee. The EPA R4 Watershed Coordinator has provided capacity development and helped network with additional potential partners and funding sources. EPA has also supported restoration efforts through the CWA 319 grants, Wetlands Program Development grants, and 5-Star Grants.

What should we do to build on and learn from what has worked in the past?

The key to initiating sustainable restoration efforts lies in the initiative and involvement of local stakeholders willing to prioritize projects and voice these expectations to local politicians. We are working with the University of West Florida and The Nature Conservancy to develop a local Center for Watershed Excellence that will provide credible technical expertise and a channel for resources to focus efforts for continued restoration of the water quality in Bayou Chico.